

Message Text

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PAGE 01 TEL AV 04802 190648 Z

14

ACTION NEA-12

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AMEMBASSY BEIRUT
USINT CAIRO
AMCONSUL JERUSALEM
AMEMBASSY LONDON
AMEMBASSY PARIS
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AMEMBSSY ROME
USMISSION USUN NY

C O N F I D E N T I A L TEL AVIV 4802

E. O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PGOV, PINT, IS

SUBJECT: PRIMIN MEIR AGREES TO STAY ON

SUMMARY: ON JUNE 17 PRIME MINISTER MEIR ANNOUNCED DECISION TO ACCEPT LEADERSHIP OF ALIGNMENT ELECTORAL LIST IF LABOR PARTY WANTS HER (WHICH IT CLEARLY DOES). ALTHOUGH NO ONE DOUBTED MRS MEIR' S SINCERITY IN WANTING TO RETIRE, CLOSE ASSOCIATES PERSUADED HER THAT SHE SHOULD CONTINUE IN PREMIERSHIP TO MAINTAIN ALIGNMENT AND NATIONAL UNITY. HER ANNOUNCEMENT PAVES WAY FOR DECISIONS ON PLATFORM AND COMPOSITION ELECTORAL LIST FOR ELECTIONS IN LATE OCTOBER OR EARLY NOVEMBER. WITH MRS MEIR HEADING LIST, FEW CHANGES ANTICIPATED IN EITHER MAKE- UP OF ALIGNMENT OR PLATFORM. ELECTIONS ARE UNLIKELY TO PRODUCE SIGNIFICANT CHANGES IN COMPOSITION OF EIGHT KNESSET. AGE AND HEALTH WILL CONTINUE TO HAVE SIGNIFICANT BEARING ON WHETHER MRS MEIR COMPLETES FULL ADDITIONAL TERM. PRESS REACTION HAS
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PAGE 02 TEL AV 04802 190648 Z

BEEN QUITE FAVORABLE, BUT SOME COMMENTATORS HAVE EXPRESSED HOPE THAT NEXT MEIR GOVERNMENT WILL SHOW GREATER FLEXIBILITY ON ARAB- ISRAELI NEGOTIATIONS. END SUMMARY.

1. ON JUNE 17 PRIME MINISTER GOLDA MEIR, IN LETTER TO LABOR PARTY SECRETARY GENERAL YADLIN, ANNOUNCED HER WILLINGNESS TO HEAD ALIGNMENT ELECTORAL LIST IN FALL ELECTIONS IF LABOR PARTY SO WISHES. HER DECISION, WHICH FOLLOWED LONG PERIOD OF UNCERTAINTY, CAME AS NO REAL SURPRISE EITHER TO LABOR PARTY OR TO ISRAELIS IN GENERAL.

2. NO ONE DOUBTED MRS MEIR' S SINCERITY IN WANTING TO RETIRE. HOWEVER, AS SHE STATED IN LETTER TO CENTRAL COMMITTEE, HER COLLEAGUES (MANY OF WHOM ARE PERSONAL FRIENDS OF FIFTY YEARS STANDING TO WHOM SHE FOUND IT HARD TO SAY NO) URGED HER TO STAY ON. AT SAME TIME, MRS MEIR WAS WORRIED ABOUT POSSIBLE SPLITS IN LABOR ALIGNMENT OVER HER SUCCESSOR AND NEW PLATFORM THAT WOULD HAVE SERIOUS POLITICAL REPERCUSSIONS AND POSSIBLY DIVIDE COUNTRY. SHE THEREFORE FELT HERSELF OBLIGATED, AS THE ONE PERSON WHO COULD MAINTAIN ALIGNMENT AND NATIONAL UNITY, TO CONTINUE IN OFFICE.

3. MRS MEIR' S ANNOUNCEMENT PAVES WAY FOR DECISIONS ON LABOR PARTY CAMPAIGN PLATFORM AND COMPOSITION OF ALIGNMENT ELECTORAL LIST FOR KNESSET ELECTIONS IN LATE OCTOBER OR EARLY NOVEMBER. ONLY OUTSTANDING PROBLEM REMAINING IS FOR MRS MEIR AND DAYAN TO REACH AGREEMENT ON PLATFORM. WHILE DEBATE PROMISES TO BE HEATED, WITH MRS MEIR ' S DECISION TO HEAD LIST AGAIN IT IS UNLIKELY THERE WILL BE MORE THAN MINOR CHANGES IN PLATFORM. HAVING LIVED WITH PRESENT INDEFINITE PLATFORM FOR PAST FOUR YEARS, MEMBERS OF LABOR PARTY CAN PROBABLY DO SO FOR ANOTHER FOUR. EXPECTED CONTINUITY OF LEADERSHIP AND PLATFORM SUGGEST THAT OCTOBER ELECTIONS WILL RESULT IN LITTLE CHANGE IN COMPOSITION OF KNESSET.

4. WHILE MRS MEIR ON SEVERAL OCCASIONS HAS STATED HER INTENTION TO SERVE FULL FOUR YEAR TERM, IF SHE RAN AGAIN, AGE FACTOR-- SHE WILL BE 79 IN 1977-- LEAVES QUESTION OPEN WHETHER SHE CAN SERVE FULL TERM. HEALTH AND FAMILY CONSIDERATIONS WILL CONTINUE TO HAVE IMPORTANCE IN THIS REGARD.

CONFIDENTIAL

CONFIDENTIAL

PAGE 03 TEL AV 04802 190648 Z

5. PRESS REACTION TO MRS MEIR' S ANNOUNCEMENT HAS BEEN QUITE FAVORABLE. MOST COMMENTATORS EMPHASIZE STABILITY IN GOVERNMENT THAT MRS MEIR CAN ENSURE. A FEW COMMENTATORS DO EXPRESS HOPE, HOWEVER, THAT MEIR GOVERNMENT WILL BE FLEXIBLE TOWARDS ISRAEL' S ARAB NEIGHBORS AND WILL BE ABLE TO OBTAIN PEACE FROM THEM.
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